DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 064 612 AC 012 706

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TITLE	Memorandum (March, 1971) on Proposed Training Course in "Community Adult Education."
INSTITUTION	Workers Educational Association, London (England).
PUB DATE	Mar 71
NOTE	15p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education Programs; *Adult Educators; Blue Collar Occupations; *Community Coordinators; Community Programs; *Course Content; *Curriculum Development; Disadvantaged Groups; Field Experience Programs; *Professional Education
IDENTIFIERS	Educational Priority Area Project; England; Liverpool; WEA; Workers Educational Association

ABSTRACT

The rationale for a diploma course in Community Adult Education is discussed, based on adult education work pioneered by the Workers' Educational Association, in association with the Liverpool Educational Priority Area Project. The need for an effective training program has become more apparent as increasing numbers of part-time tutors are involved in the project. Their continuing dependence on the tutor/organizer's advice and assistance in matters of curriculum, method, and approach illustrate the need for a new type of training for professionals working in this field. The proposed course would involve practical work in the Liverpool Project, as well as the following academic subjects: (1) theory and practice of community development, (2) market research and the social services, (3) sociology, (4) popular culture, (5) learning through doing theory and techniques, (6) sociology of education, and (7) philosophy of education. (CL)

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MEMORANDUM (MARCH,1971) ON PROPOSED TRAINING COURSE IN "COMMUNITY ADULT EDUCATION" BY TOM LOVETT

(Previously published in an abridged form in Education and Training, September, 1971).

Educational Priority Area Project

The adult education work pioneeered by the WEA, in association with the Liverpool Educational Priority Area Project, has reached a crucial stage in its development. Further progress, along the lines suggested in an article in "Studies in Adult Education", will depend on:-

i. The willingness of the extra-mural departments and the WEA to provide an effective training scheme for workers in the field of community adult education.

ii. More research in depth into those aspects of adult education practise associated with the work in Liverpool and other areas of special need.

This need is now becoming very apparent as more and more part time tutors are involved in the Liverpool E.P.A. work and the WEA and local authorities become increasingly interested in exploring the adult educational needs of working class communities. Many of the part-time tutors working in the Liverpool E.P.A. are either trained teachers in primary and secondary schools or lecturers in further education with WEA experience. It is obvious, however, that their continuing dependence on the tutor/organiser's advice and assistance in matters of curriculum, method and approach illustrate the need for a new and special type of training for professionals working in this field.

A new professionalism in Adult Education

Generally speaking it is true to say that the great majority of tutors employed by the WEA and other responsible bodies are specialists in one or more academic disciplines. Their training and academic background reflects the emphasis on the breakdown of knowledge into watertight compartments. Their particular professional skills are to be found in their ability to encourage some understanding of these disciplines amongst adults with a largely non-academic background.

However, despite the lack of an academic background the students usually recognise the relevance of this academic breakdown of knowledge. They and the tutors are part of a commonly accepted intellectual heritage with the emphasis on the exercise of cognitive skills. They tend to speak the same language code. The tutor responds to a need or request for adult education which fits into a generally accepted pattern. He is, in fact, very much part of an academic tradition and it is not surprising that so many WEA tutors find their way into the extra-mural or other departments of the universities. For many the WEA is seen as a training ground for a career in university adult education.

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In working class communities there is no such shared intellectual heritage between students and tutor. Cognitive skills are at a premium. Academic disciplines are divorced from the realities of life and have no meaning. The emphasis is on the effective, the shared experience, the emotions. Conceptualisation unrelated to specific and concrete realities is difficult for most adults in such communities. Their language reflects this concern for the immediate, the shared experience, the emotional response. It is not a restricted language except in its lack of abstractions and logical analysis associated with middle class communities. It can, in fact, be very colourful and nothing could be further from the truth than the belief that this restricted language code implies a certain amount of inarticulateness.

Given this situation even the most enthusiastic adult tutor can meet with a totally blank response unless he has the ability to recognise educational needs and adopt his material accordingly. This is not easy. Needs are not so apparent as in a traditional adult education situation. The lack of response is often not an expression of non-interest in adult education but a rejection of its traditional forms as expressed by the tutor.

The Recognition of Educational Needs

The need then is for tutors who are trained to recognise situations where adult education can be of benefit to those concerned. This implies listening to people, becoming fully acquainted with their personal and social problems, their life style, their formal and informal organisations. The E.P.A. Project did mount a survey in a district of Liverpool to find out the nature of educational needs in the area. The operation was a partial success but a great deal more needs to be known about techniques for exploring an individual's educational needs.

The social services are concerned with this problem of "needs" because notwithstanding the variety of services offered, they are often either rejected or inappropriate. Yet it is arguable that at least people in a working class community know what a social need is - the poor family, the old person living alone. What they find difficult in answering is a straight-forward request to list their adult educational needs. It is not something immediately apparent and requires a great deal of skill on the part of the interviewer to elicit a response in terms which the interviewees understand. The skills associated with Market Research and the Social Services could be used to some advantage in this situation.

Learning through doing and Community Development

If the skills associated with Market Research and the Social Services are appropriate so also are some skills identified with community development. The ability to assist residents in solving some of their more immediate social problems could be a means of assisting adults to "learn through doing". At the moment Community Development exercises like summer play schemes are limited to the organisational aspect of community involvement. What needs to be explored is the educational aspect of such schemes. How can an adult educational element be introduced which will enable individual residents to learn how to occupy their children in useful play throughout the year? The E.P.A. Project has attempted such an exercise but what is needed is a much more controlled project possibly in co-operation with the child-care department.

Organisation of Adult Education and Community Development

Aside from such learning situations, there is a wealth of knowledge and expertise associated with community development work which would be of immense value to an adult educationalist attempting to form 'classes' or 'activities' in working class communities. If the content of adult education is of extreme importance in responding to the needs of working class communities the organisation of such education is equally important

and presents particular difficulties.

Community Development workers have long recognised the importance of informality and flexibility in encouraging community groups in our large cities. If this is so important in encouraging community action then it has proved even more so in developing adult education in the Liverpool E.P.A. The ability to conduct an educational exercise in an atmosphere of informality and flexibility does not come easy to tutors with a background of teaching in a more structured framework. It is true that adult educationalists have much to learn from experience in community development.

Distinction between Community Development and Adult Education

It must be emphasised that although adult educationalists have much to learn from Community Development the former is not the latter. Certainly on occasions the border between the two is extremely thin. Adult education however makes a contribution to community development. The work, in Liverpool, is a continual process of clarifying the distinction between the two and defining the role of adult education in community development.

Nor is it the case that the skills associated with community development are only of value in dealing with deprived communities. The E.P.A. in Liverpool is certainly an extreme case of community deprivation and requires a special kind of skill and expertise. However the boundary of the E.P.A is very haphazardly drawn and contains a number of quite distinct communities. Some are, in fact, very stable communities yet the emphasis on flexibility and informality was just as important in encouraging an interest in adult education.

Knowledge of Working Class Culture

If adult educationalists are to bring a new set of professional skills to the problem of education for working class communities then they will also require an intimate awareness of working class culture if they are to make effective use of such skills. Such a cultural awareness implies not only a knowledge of living styles but also an appreciation of artistic expressions of that culture as seen in popular songs, films and TV. This is vitally important for a number of very practical reasons:-

i. A knowledge of living styles, customs and attitudes has proved of immense value to the tutor/organiser in the E.P.A. during organised discussions with residents on themes of their choosing. The ability to relate a general problem, to a concrete specific issue common to many residents is an invaluable aid to further discussion and possible illumination of some difficult concept. It has also proved of benefit in encouraging people to commit themselves to some form of adult education e.g. many residents are keen to come together to discuss problems associated with the family or the neighbourhood but these are just concepts unless the tutor can spell out the problems he hopes to discuss in terms the residents can understand and appreciate. The tutor/organiser has mounted many a "rescue operation" when a part-time tutor has obviously failed to communicate with a group because he lacked the necessary knowledge. This becomes a burden when it is necessary to repeat the exercise everytime a group finishes a certain activity and needs someone to awaken a new interest.

ii. Much popular music, film and TV is rejected by adult educationalists because of its apparent lack of intellectual or educational content. However, for a large proportion of the working class in this country, this is very much part of their culture. Certainly such a "popular culture" is not confined to the working class but in no other class does it have such an all pervading influence.

Even such experts in the field as Richard Hoggart now recognise that aspects of this popular culture express certain deeply held myths about the nature and purpose of life amongst the working class. The popular song, the film often reflect emotions and attitudes widespread throughout working class communities. Yet very few educationalists are aware of the importance of such popular art forms and the fact that they can be used to evoke response and encourage discussion of very complicated and conceptual issues.

If we accept the point made at the beginning of this paper about the importance of the shared experienced, the immediate, the effective, the emotional response then film and TV can be of invaluable assistance to an adult educationalist working in this field. However, this implies not just a technical acquaintance with the mass media but an awareness of its relationship to working class life styles and an appreciation of its good points as well as its bad. Too hasty a value judgement on aspects of popular culture only emphasises the cultural gulf between adult education and the mass of the population.

Certainly the tutor/organiser in Liverpool has found a very excited response to some films amongst a number of groups especially young adults in deprived areas. It is too easily forgotten that although many people lack the cognitive skills associated with a reading culture, nevertheless as the McLuhan generation they find no difficulty in dealing with the sophisticated symbolism of the cinema and TV. To quote Professor Bantock in the second of two articles on Popular Education in the Times Educational Supplement "what however also need exploiting are possibilities specifically within the characteristic twentieth century art forms like film, TV and radio". There is nothing new in such a demand and in fact valuable work of this nature is going on in some secondary schools and F.E. colleges but it needs to be explored in an adult education context.

"Living Today" - A Practical Example of Community Adult Education

The Radio Merseyside series "Living Today" written by the E.P.A. tutor organiser is a practical illustration of the points made above. The decision to produce such a series was taken because:

i. It was increasingly obvious the part-time tutors working in the E.P.A. lacked any clear idea of what sort of adult activity to offer their groups.

ii. Since it wasn't possible to offer a different activity to each group it was decided to offer the same activity i.e. participation in a discussion group linked to a radio programme.

iii. Many tutors had found it difficult to sustain a discussion without some stimulus. The radio series offered such a stimulus and a series of discussion points to concentrate attention of a particular subject each week.

iv. The need to link each week's discussion to some central theme was a step in the direction of a more structured educational exercise.

The theme chosen was "Living Today" a series of six programmes on the changing pattern of authority as it affected working class communities in Liverpool i.e. the family; the neighbourhood; the church; the school; the local authority and the government. It thus combined a central theme with a certain amount of variety and relevance - both of which have proved to be central ingredients in previous discussion groups.

At the same time the series was concerned with a complex concept "authority", its effect on individual behaviour, and the reasons for its changing pattern and influence. As mentioned earlier such concepts are difficult for working class adults to grasp. Thus the decision to use practical, immediate, concrete problems to illustrate the concept.

The programmes were designed to last fifteen minutes yet to include a great deal of material presented in a manner likely to hold people's attention. Fifteen minutes of talk would have been a disaster, so the programmes were a mixture of song, drama, residents comments and professional viewpoints. The songs were chosen not just for the sake of variety but because it was felt they helped awaken a response to the subject under discussion. Comments from participants about the programmes confirmed this belief. Many mentioned how appropriate the songs were in the context of the particular programme.

The series was extremely successful, although at different levels. It is hoped to produce a B.B.C. booklet on the series later in the year with comments from the ten tutors involved and the participants. If possible the tutors will be encouraged to design similar activities for their group for next September, although this need not be a radio series. However, the lack of background knowledge and training is likely to be a deterrent to such an exercise. On a practical level the series will be repeated in the autumn but extended to half an hour to include a discussion between people who took part in the original discussion groups and professionals with responsibility for some of the problems they discussed e.g. community development workers discussing the issues raised by the programme on the neighbourhood with local residents.

The Need for Further Research

Each of the elements referred to above would form the basis of a training course for workers in community adult education. However a number of these elements require research, both in traditional and action/research terms ie.

i. The contribution of market research and social services techniques in exploring the educational needs of working class communities.

ii. An exploration in depth of "learning through doing" techniques particularly in relation to community development exercises.

iii. A continuing definition in depth of the role of adult education in community development.

iv. Research into popular culture, its role in working class communities and ways and means by which aspects of that culture could be used for educational purposes.

Within the Liverpool University Institute of Extension Studies there is already a combination of skills and expertise in many of these fields e.g. Keith Jackson's work in community development, the work of the child care department particularly their recent exercise in "learning through doing" in Gt. Georges; Bob Houlton's work in the mass media; Barry Elsey's research into the "Newson adult".

A Diploma in Community Adult Education

If this research and action was co-ordinated then it would form a solid basis for a Diploma in Community Adult Education. Such a Diploma could use the Liverpool E.P.A. as its practical testing ground for students. Students could"learn through doing" themselves by spending a part of each week in practical work. This is already the case with students from the colleges of education working in E.P.A. schools.

Instead of a few weeks teaching practice in such schools they spend the whole year in the schools using the practical problems they face as an

illustration of the theory. Their tutors stay with them so that theory and practise can be related on the spot. This sort of organisation should be possible in a diploma course in community adult education.

Students could be broken into groups and given a particular area of Liverpool to explore. They could mount a survey of individual homes as in the Earle Road exercise using more sophisticated techniques, or they could explore the network of formal and informal organisations in a community. The emphasis would be on discovering educational needs. It would be up to the students to consider ways in which these needs could be met using the knowledge and material gained from the academic and theoretical aspect of the diploma course. It would then be up to them to organise some adult activities in co-operation with their tutors and the WEA tutor/organiser.

The academic side of the diploma course would possibly take the following format:

1. THEORY AND PRACTISE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
   (with an emphasis on the problems of re-development and community organisation)
2. MARKET RESEARCH AND THE SOCIAL SERVICES
   (an analysis of the skills employed in these two professions to explore "needs" and "interests" and their adoption in an adult education context)
3. SOCIOLOGY
   (with particular emphasis on the structure and framework of working class communities. The role of the family, the neighbourhood) etc.
4. POPULAR CULTURE
   (an analysis in depth of the various aspects of popular culture. Its relationship to working class attitudes and beliefs. The use of elements of this culture in an educational context)
5. "LEARNING THROUGH DOING"
   (an examination in theory and practise of learning through doing techniques. The use of such techniques in an adult education context. The link between such techniques and Community Development)
6. SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION
   (with particular emphasis on the work of Bernstein on language and the sociological reasons for the poor educational performance of working class children.)
7. PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION
   (Philosophy of adult education. The philosophy of primary education and the relationship between the two. The relevance of primary school teaching techniques and methods derived from this philosophy and the problems of adult education for working class communities. The relationship between these techniques and 5. above)

Student Potential

The student potential for the course outlined above is very wide and varied. It includes the tutor/organisers with the WEA and their part-time tutors. Keith Jackson and the E.P.A. tutor organiser have already written a paper on the need for re-organisation with the WEA and a new type of professionalism for its tutor organisers. Certainly the WEA at national level is keenly interested in ideas for reform and both the tutor organiser and district secretary in Liverpool are called upon increasingly by other districts of the WEA to advise them on methods and techniques for introducing adult education in working class communities.

The Local Authorities are already jumping on the community adult education "bandwagon". Derbyshire has appointed a Neighbourhood Worker in Adult

Education and Bristol have recently advertised for three Community Education Officers with adult education experience to explore the educational needs of communities in Bristol. However its extremely doubtful if either of these authorities, or any others, have any clear idea of the role of adult education in community development. The area community wardens in Liverpool were originally charged with exploring educational needs but their role has now become that of community development workers even though they are employed by the Education Committee.

A great deal of discussion is going on in the Liverpool authority about transferring the Area Community Wardens to a special community development department, in the Town Clerks office and defining a specifically educational role for workers employed by the Education Department. The E.P.A. tutor organiser has presented a case to the Education Committee based on his own experience for establishing a joint appointment to work in this field following the lines set out in the article in "Studies in Adult Education".

Community development workers and community wardens would also find a great deal to interest them in such a course. This is particularly true of the latter. Many such wardens need a fresh approach to educational needs in their area if they are to make the best use of their community centres. The same is true of those in charge of community schools in working class areas. Netherley Comprehensive School is an example of a new community school underutilised by the community mainly due to the traditional approach of those in charge of adult activities. A course in Community Adult Education would be of immense value to such people.

Community development officers would also find the course of value particularly in those situations where the emphasis is on individual residents acquiring particular skills i.e. learning to run a committee, taking minutes etc. However, there are large areas of community development where adult education could make a special contribution particularly in the field of "learning through doing". Knowledge gained during the course could thus be of general and specific value to community development workers in this country as well as a number of other professionals working in this field i.e. child care officers and youth leaders. The work of the latter two professions is becoming increasingly community oriented with the emphasis on assisting people to solve their own problems.

Part-Time courses and In-Service Training

Although a Diploma in Community Adult Education would be a full time course possibly of two years duration other arrangements would be necessary to meet the needs of those who cannot take part in such full time training. Many tutor-organisers and community development workers could be catered for by part-time course over a longer period, plus intensive weekend and week long residential courses similar to those offered to shop-stewards in the Trade Union movement by the WEA and other R.B.

Relationship between the WEA, the E.P.A. Project and The Institute of Extension Studies.

The course in Community Adult education outlines above opens up new and exciting fields of research in adult education. It is also in line with a perceptible trend in educational thought and practise in this country. To quote from Professor Bantock again "The ability to understand abstractions at different levels and in different conceptual fields is fundamental to the implementation of our present purposes in education and a major reason for thinking some extensive reorientation of our present practices desirable". Adult education thus has an opportunity to

pioneering, to lead in many aspects of educational thought and practise. For various reasons Liverpool is the centre where a great deal of experimentalwork in adult education and community development is now in progress. The links between the Institute, the WEA, and the E.P.A. Project has proved of benefit to all concerned. The tutor organiser works closely with the head of the Social Studies Division in defining the role of adult education in community development and it is hoped to produce a joint paper on this subject shortly. Students from the Adult Education Division have been involved in projects connected with the tutors work i.e. monitoring the E.P.A. Show (an exercise in adult games produced by Gt. Georges Community Arts Centre) and a survey of formal and informal organisations in the West Everton end of the Educational Priority Area.

If a course in Community Adult Education is seen as a practical possibility in the Institute of Extension Studies then the links with the W.E.A. and E.P.A. Project need to be strengthened and possibly placed on a more formal basis. The role of the tutor-organiser may need to be redefined in terms which place more emphasis on research and advice on training. Possibly a joint appointment by the WEA and the Institute would be of benefit to both bodies. If this isn't possible then some other arrangement may offer an opportunity for the three bodies to work closely together on this new and exciting aspect of adult education.

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